

LOVE

Lesson Number Ten

by M. David Johnson

20 March 1983

John 13:34 & 35 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."

II John 5 says, "And now I beg you, lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another."

And, Hebrews 13:1 says simply, "Let brotherly love continue." Turn with me now to I Corinthians 13:13 on Page 1000 in your Bibles.

#

I Corinthians 13:13, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

#

Now turn back a few pages to Romans 5:1-5 on Page 980. This passage also discusses faith, hope, and love. And this passage shows us how not only faith and hope but also peace, suffering, endurance, and character all tie together in our lives and all rest on the undergirding foundation of love and grace.

#

Romans 5:1-5, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."

#

Love is the greatest. It is the sure foundation upon which our faith is built. Without God's love our faith and hope would be in vain. And, wonder of wonders, the Holy Spirit has poured the love of God into our hearts. How could anything in the world even BEGIN to compare with this wonderful and immeasurable gift.

In Galatians we read of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit, and the first named is love. All other fruit comes from this. It seems like Paul made an error in grammar here but it's really not an error: the usage reveals even more wonders. Galatians, chapter 5, verses 22 and 23 say, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; against such there is no law." This seems like an error in grammar. "The fruit is..." is singular but the list of fruit contains nine separate items. It would seem that if Paul had used proper grammar, he would have said "The fruits are..." rather than "The fruit is". Certainly it would not be proper to say, "The fruit of California is apples, oranges, figs, dates, prunes, etc." But, by the use of this seemingly ungrammatical form, God is teaching us that the fruit which he grows in our lives comes in a cluster like grapes.

There are two Parts to Christian teaching. There is the message of evangelism; what Christ has done by dying for us on the cross. But there is also the message of the work of the Holy Spirit in daily life. We in evangelical circles are often guilty of offering little more than the message of evangelism. It is all well and good to talk about the glory of the cross, and to set forth the wonder of how Christ took our Place and died in our stead. But his death had a Purpose. And that Purpose is here right now. That Purpose is the life of Christ within us.

Galatians 4:19 says, "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" And, II Corinthians 11:1,2 says, "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine Jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to Present you as a Pure bride to her one husband." Let us understand, then, that God reached down and redeemed us from the dung heap of this earth for the Purpose of Pouring His love into us and forming Christ within us. He has left us in the midst of this world to reveal the Power and life of Christ.

The Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven, but at Pentecost He sent the Holy Spirit, not only that millions of believers might be saved out of this Present evil world but also that they might live in it as lights, holding forth the Word of life.

Many People make the mistake of believing the literal wording of the old hymn, "The Light of the World is Jesus." But this is not what the Bible says. The Lord Jesus is NOT directly the light of the world in this Present age. John 9:5 says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." But the day came when the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven: it was as though the sun had gone down, and Gross darkness settled over the earth once more. But one glimmer of light was left. It was the first Pale sliver of the new moon, the true Church. It was intended to grow and glow and reflect the light of the absent sun. The world lies in darkness when the sun has set, but by looking up at the moon, we can tell that the sun is still shining. Thus the Lord Jesus meant the true body of His followers to be on this earth. Although He knew that as soon as He departed from the earth darkness would set in, and that this darkness would continue, He said (in Matthew 5:14) to those who believed in Him, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid." Is it any wonder that the world is in darkness today when the Church seeks to glow in her own light instead of reflecting her absent Lord? Turn with me now to Romans, chapter 8, verses 35 through 39 on Pages 983 and 984 of the Bibles. This Passage confirms our eternal security in the Love of God. Nothing can take it from us.

#

Romans 8:35-39. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or Persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or Peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor Principalities, nor things Present, nor things to come, nor Powers, nor height, nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

#

If Christ had done no more than come and live among men, we would have no Savior, and the world would long since have forgotten him. All the deeds of compassion which he wrought while here on earth have been paralleled by men who left fine homes to go and live among lepers, for example. Some of them even contracted leprosy in their contacts with those they had come to help. Christ did not contract the leprosy of our sin when he came from Heaven. That is why he was eligible, as the Lamb without spot and without blemish, to go to the cross and die for us.

God did not allow this love to remain enshrouded in history. He loves us - we who live upon this earth today. And He has done something about bringing that Love to us in order that it might become operative in our hearts. We did not love Him, and cannot by nature love Him, but He loves us and made that love available to all and real in the hearts of multitudes. I John 4:10 says, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins." Hallelujah, WHAT a Savior!

#

Turn with me to John, chapter thirteen, verses thirty-four and thirty-five on Page 938 in your Bibles. I have quoted this passage at the beginning of each lesson of this series. It is Jesus' great new commandment. It is what makes us so different in the eyes of the world.

#

John 13:34 & 35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

#

Now turn with me to Revelation, chapter three, verses fourteen through twenty-two on Page 1074 in your Bibles. Today, we are going to close our study of love in the Bible with its application to Biblical Counseling. EVERY christian should be capable of counseling others. You don't have to have a degree in psychology; in fact, you can probably do more to successfully help other christians who are hurting and need help and support than even the most brilliant of secular psychologists could. But there is one thing that is needed more than anything else before you can do this.

#

In Revelation 3:15-22, Jesus says, "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich; and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be

zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

#

In the years that we have been coming to Northbrook Covenant Church, we have noted that it has been a consistently friendly church, one where the members were always ready with a smile and a greeting on Sunday morning. But we've also noted that except for some individuals, it is also sometimes a rather shallow church, much given to lip service. We talk a lot about things we ought to do; we discuss them from almost every angle possible. But often nothing actually happens. We're not any worse than many churches and we're probably better than a lot, but we've still got a lot of room for improvement.

Have you ever really listened to some of the conversations we have during our fellowship hours after church or to some of the things that are discussed before Sunday School class?

"Good morning, Sam, good to see you this morning."

"Oh, hi, Bill, how are you?"

"Fine thanks, how are you?"

"Can't complain except that Susie's down with the flu."

"Is that right? I sure hope she gets better. Our Andy had a high fever last Tuesday, 102. Been an awful lot of sickness lately."

"Yeah - Oh Wow, I'm late for class - Better get moving!"

Most of us are so used to this kind of conversation that we accept it as normal and we call it Christian fellowship. Yet, inside where no one sees and where we let no one enter, we are hurting badly. Someone in this church is no doubt aching about a husband or wife who drinks every night, a son or daughter who is defiant and probably immoral if not worse, a bank account that's dwindling and debts that are mounting, a job in jeopardy, a marriage on the rocks, and many other problems.

People in our sin-corrupted world are hurting and hurting badly. Yet so often our interactions within the community of believers, people with whom we share the profound oneness of common membership in Christ's body, are casually friendly, genuine but shallow, and utterly trivial. We warmly shake hands every Sunday with people who are about to come apart at the seams and we never know it until they do.

There are three kinds or levels of counseling which can be carried out by the members and staff of the church. These levels of counseling, when operating properly, should be sufficient to meet the needs of all except the most severe cases.

Every Christian is called to a ministry of encouraging and helping others, especially those in the household of faith. We do not need more conferences and books on esoteric issues of counseling theory; we need to challenge, encourage, and assist our local church members to get on

with the job of one-anothering: love one another, bear one another's burden, pray for one another. Encouragement is one kind of a counseling ministry available to every Christian. Our Ministers of Care are involved in this kind of counseling ministry to some degree but it is a ministry that we should all be involved in more and more. Every one of us should be involved, not just the Ministers of Care. This encouragement is Level One counseling.

Our Pastors, Sunday School teachers, and other church leaders have the special opportunity and responsibility to teach biblical principles of living. That is the second kind of counseling; Level Two counseling. Pastor Bucher is specifically trained for a specialized ministry of counseling involving deeper exploration into stubborn problems. This is the third kind of counseling; Level Three counseling.

We certainly could use more qualified Christians at level two and level three. More Sunday School teachers to teach us more about God's word and how to apply it in our daily lives and to the problems of our lives are always in demand. More third level counselors who are able to deal with the family destroying persistent difficulties that so many of us have to face these days would be a blessing of large proportions. But level one counseling, the ministry of encouraging and helping others, is one that each and every one of us should become involved in right now!

In his book, EFFECTIVE BIBLICAL COUNSELING, Dr. Lawrence Crabb, a Christian Clinical Psychologist says, "...all members of the body can and should be involved in Level I counseling. Some members...could be trained in Level II counseling. A few selected individuals could be equipped to handle the deeper, more stubborn, complicated problems in Level III counseling. If properly developed, ...every counseling need (except ones which involve organic problems) would be met within the church community."

The place to start is with you and me. We can all be encouragers and helpers. The majority of people who are experiencing personal anguish can be tremendously helped by the warm, genuine interest of people who care. When I feel loved, my burdens seem lighter. The knowledge that I am loved provides me with strength to face my problems and better enables me to believe in a loving Lord. I have a perfectly legitimate sense of security as I meditate on the marvelous truth of my oneness with other believers, made possible by Jesus' supreme act of love. The reality of the family I have in Christ holds me up in the face of all that might depress and defeat me.

Single Christians; those who have never been married and those who are divorced or widowed often indicate that their greatest problem is loneliness: no one to share life with, no family. Within the church, such a statement becomes a scathing indictment of our failure to obey our Lord's command to love one another. This is because the only eternal family is the family of Christ. Our natural families through birth or marriage are temporary and are illustrations, but our heavenly family which exists right now is eternal and eternally real. We need to practice that truth in many ways, including mutual loving support.

This is Level I counseling. Counseling by encouragement depends upon an awareness of painful emotions

in a member of the family and a sincere effort to understand them, growing out of an attitude of compassion and concern for the Person who hurts.

Maybe you initially become aware of another's Problem by noticing that your brother or sister in Christ is quieter than usual, a little distant or strained in her conversation, perhaps gloomy, or maybe indefinably but obviously different than usual. Prompted by compassion and by a desire to communicate the love of Christ, you then would look for an opportunity to encourage, to engage in meaningful conversation with the objective of helping the other.

Last Fall, the discussion in the Sunday School Class I was attending got rather heated one Sunday. When the class was over, I felt that I had been too strong in some of the things I had said during the discussion and that I had probably made myself look like a fool to the others in the class. The next Sunday, I was careful not to become involved in the discussion at all; afraid that I might put my foot in my mouth again. After class, Ray Dahlberg came up to me in the narthex and asked me if anything was wrong. When I explained the Problem, he put his hand on my shoulder and told me that it wasn't true, that my contributions had been appreciated and he thought they were valuable. That little word of encouragement may not seem like a great deal to you, but it meant a lot to me! That's Level I counseling!

Of course, I'm not suggesting that you become syrupy. Nothing at all is wrong with friendly, surface chitchat, provided you are capable of shifting to a more intensely personal level if required by the situation. To be blind to others needs is not good; but neither is it good to be a well-meaning would-be counselor beating the bushes for a despairing victim to overwhelm. I am not suggesting that we CREATE counseling opportunities, but rather that we sensitize ourselves to those valid ones which cross our paths.

And, while I'm mentioning things to be cautious about, we should also remember that some people are sympathy grabbers. It is often unintentional on their parts, but they are still anxious to be noticed. A down look, a depressed tone, a grave, heroic shrug of the shoulders and a stalwart if somewhat burdened smile - these maneuvers often are designed to attract sympathy. It is NORMAL for us to want sympathy some times. We all love to produce an effect, create an impression, stir up favorable attention. When someone begs for our sympathy in such a fashion, our sympathy and encouragement are the right things to give. But those who seem to regularly and consistently demand such attention and never seem to make any responsible efforts to deal with their Problems are more in need of Level II counseling than Level I. They need less encouragement and more exhortation!

Keeping these cautions in mind, let's look at how Level I counseling might work for you. Let's say that you notice a friend looking a bit down during Sunday School class. You don't have any idea what the Problem is but she just doesn't look right. First of all, remember that the sad look on her face MAY be nothing more than a bad case of heartburn from too much coffee at breakfast. Your first

action should be to silently Pray something like, "Father, if you want to use me to encourage her, I am willing. Make me sensitive without being nosy." Wouldn't it be something if Christians were routinely open and sensitized to opportunities to encourage one another? Half the battle in developing a functioning Level I counseling ministry is won if we can stimulate a continuous attitude of loving helpfulness in each member toward one another.

Let's go on with this example. After class, you go over to your friend and offer a warm, casual greeting. "Good to see you. How're things going for you?" DON'T begin with, "You look down, what's the matter?" unless you know the Person really well and know she would welcome your personal inquiry. If the initial question is motivated by genuine interest and love rather than by "busybodiness" or mere courtesy, the response is likely to contain some indication of a Problem IF INDEED THERE IS ONE! Again, the real Problem may best be handled with a tablet of Alka-Seltzer.

Suppose she answers, "This isn't one of my better days but I'll be fine, how are you?" Suppose you think you notice a mood of discouragement in her voice and manner. What does a Level I counselor say at this Point? Think what YOU would say. Remember, all you are trying to do is to understand and express love, to reinforce the liberating truth that the love of Christ is fully sufficient to meet one's needs for significance and security.

You do NOT say, "Well, we all have days like that." This response effectively ends the conversation by not taking the Person seriously enough to avoid meaningless cliches.

You do NOT say, "Isn't it great to know that all things work together for good?" Spiritual truths offered glibly as an instant Panacea have the effect of driving painful feelings underground where they remain unresolved and frequently produce Psychological Problems. (She thinks, "If all things work for good then I should not be upset; I'll pretend I'm not.").

You do NOT say, "Hope things get better. I'm sure they will." A statement like this just communicates that you're really not interested in her or her Problem. You're presenting Christian hope as empty well-wishing utterly devoid of any real content and without any real foundation.

You do NOT ask, "What's wrong?" This is too direct even if you know the Person well. Most People are not ready to reveal significant conflicts quickly. A direct question like this may frighten the Person into retreating with a surface answer like, "Oh, nothing really, at least nothing that a good dinner won't cure."

You do NOT ask, "Children acting-up again?" Guessing where the Problem lies makes you seem insensitive even if you guess right.

All of these things you should NOT say are general, "canned" responses. You should never use a "canned" response in any counseling situation. You must be yourself. Your words must be your own. What you want to communicate is interest and concern. You want to convey the attitude, "I'm here, I'm listening, I care." You might say something like:

"Sounds like you're a little down."



"Not feeling as good as you'd like, huh?"

"You feel a little weighted down, eh?"

If she opens up, your responsibility remains basically the same: communicate interest and concern. So many people wonder, "What can I say to help? I'm no counselor." Others feel pressured to solve the problem on the spot. Well, Level I counseling offers the powerful therapy of true acceptance. Most problems that people have result from a frustrated need for significance and security, a deeply felt attitude that "no one cares about me." Don't EVER think of Level I counseling as MERELY communicating love. There is nothing "mere" about truly accepting another human being. Continuing to warmly involve yourself in whatever emotional pain your fellow Christian shares will in itself have a powerful and sometimes revolutionary effect.

Don't be too quick to offer advice or to suggest seeing the Pastor or one of the Level II Counselors. Stay awhile and listen first. If good advice occurs to you, offer it. If you feel the problem is more than you can adequately help with, then suggest seeing a Level-II counselor.

#

Love one another.

#

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

#

Let us pray together.

\*\*\*\*\*